College Access Challenge Grant – IDAHO

Near Peer Mentor Program

Program Introduction

Idaho's historically low college-going and completion rates are the catalyst for the Idaho State Board of Education's (SBOE) development of the Idaho Near Peer Mentor Program (NPMP) in conjunction with state and national partners. The ultimate goal of the program is to increase the number of high school students who graduate from secondary school and enroll in and complete postsecondary education with an emphasis on underserved populations, while developing strategies for long-term program sustainability.

Through its participation in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network, Idaho selected a "near peer" mentor model originally developed by the National College Advising Corps (NCAC) for implementation. NCAC's model takes recent college graduates (one year or less), trains them in college access and success strategies and then places them alongside counseling and career resource staff in targeted high schools (high concentration of first generation college students/low-income and minority students).

Financial resources to cover program start-up and administration, technical assistance in the areas of program development and implementation, and various resources/tools to ensure program success are provided to Near Peer sites. Recognition of staff selection and local community knowledge are key to program success. Accordingly, if at all feasible, SBOE hires local college/career guides ("Near Peers") while still ensuring integrity of the program model. Idaho's diversity requires acknowledgement that one model does not fit all. Program flexibility and creativity are cornerstones of the NPMP program.

In addition to sustainability, future expansion sites will need to align themselves with key program compatibility and success criteria. A list of these school characteristics and related matrix follows.

<u>Essential Characteristics</u>:

- **Predominantly first generation college goers, low-income or minority student body.** Consistent with primary program goals, Near Peers work in schools with significant disadvantaged student populations.
- **An established track record of K-12 and postsecondary collaboration or other systemic commitment to support a college going culture.** Collaboration with the postsecondary community documents the school's commitment to many of the same goals of Idaho's Near Peer Mentor Program.

- **Leadership alignment and support.** The school displays evidence of past student outreach efforts upon which the Near Peers can build and enhance. In addition, school staff's enthusiasm for the program is crucial.
- **Positive working relationship with SBOE.** Particularly in sites at which SBOE directly supervises the Near Peers, having a strong relationship from the outset is a key to success.
- **Technology and space.** IT resources, including the capacity to host internet access, as well as provide physical space for the Near Peer's office or workspace are fundamental program requirements. Additionally, a school must show a willingness and ability to create program capacity up front.
- **Data collection.** Whether using an outside organization – like the National Student Clearinghouse – or its own institutional database, the school must support program needs for outcomes tracking. This includes tracking of **college participation rates and other program outcomes** as one determining factor in the Near Peer site selection process.

Preferred Characteristics:

- **Alignment** between middle school and high school, in addition to alignment between K-12 and postsecondary, often increases student success through the educational pipeline.
- **Knowledge and use of Idaho Career Information System (CIS) within the school.** Incorporation of CIS assists the Near Peers in promoting and integrating its use into classroom activities and developing students' career plans.
- **Family/Community involvement.** Involvement with parent and community organizations can be leveraged by Near Peers to deepen student engagement in relevant activities.
- **Collaboration with outside agencies.** Community and business organizations can serve as trusted sources of information and/or services for Near Peers.

Site Selection Matrix

Idaho Near Peer Mentor Program Eligibility Components	
Essential Characteristics:	**Measure(s)**
Predominantly low-income student body	Documentation of Title I status or evidence of student body composition: Over 50% must be first generation college goers, low-income (USDOE standards), and or minority students.
Track record of collaboration or building a college going culture	Documentation of a signed MOA/MOU with a postsecondary institution along with program outcome data/participation levels or evidence of other college-going culture activities such as Advanced Placement classes, Career/College Fairs, and Financial Aid Nights.
Leadership alignment and support	Measures of integration and school wide support could include a letter of commitment from counseling staff, agreement from school leadership that Near Peer staff will be included in all school

	counseling/career resource activities.
Positive relationship with SBOE	Demonstrated ongoing participation in SBOE programs and services (i.e. FAFSA Completion Event, campus visits, etc.)
Technology and physical space	Commitment of a physical office space and local IT staff/resources will be treated as a program match.
Data collection	Signed commitment for data tracking on program outcomes.

Idaho Near Peer Mentor Program Eligibility Components	
Preferred Characteristics:	**Measure(s)**
P-20 alignment	Documented effort toward collaboration between K-12 and higher education or related community organizations.
Knowledge and use of CIS	Current activation agreement with CIS and documentation of moderate to high student usage and or staff participation in CIS training(s).
Community involvement	Documentation of local networks available for use in communication with students/families.
Collaboration with outside agencies	Standing agreements which detail formal networks/partnerships upon which the Near Peer program could build.